

## CHAPTER III

### THE ECONOMY OF INDO-CHINA

"L'Indochine est comme la vigne de Naboth: si riche  
qu'elle ait *été*  
elle s'est épuisée a force d'être pressée et grattée par  
tant de mains."

*Pasqder*

#### PRODUCTION: NATURAL RESOURCE

classical image of Indo-China as a pole  
balanced by two  
i baskets of rice has a significance beyond that of the  
economic  
sphere. The pole which represents the Annamite  
Range is a spiritual  
as well as a physical barrier, for it separates the  
countries of Indian  
culture from those of Chinese civilization. While these  
mountains cut  
off the spring rains from the Mekong valley, they make  
possible a  
second harvest of rice in Tonkin and in most of Annam,  
whose southern-  
most region is climatically linked to the Mekong. Its  
deep valleys create  
a profound isolation that makes of Annam the most  
backward of the  
Annamite countries. Unfortunately, not only is its long  
coast inhospitable—particularly in harvest time—but the back  
country of dunes  
and wooded hills rises to inaccessibly high peaks which  
cut off Laos  
from the coast and orientate its economy towards  
Siam—political  
frontiers to the contrary. The plateaux of this range  
have a certain  
economic value as pasture land, forest, and redlands.  
But the hostile Moi  
tribes ensconced there, as well as the congenital  
Annamite hatred of  
the forest, have, up to now, prevented utilizing these  
resources. Two  
passes traverse the range. One of these, the Porte  
d'Annam, marks a  
cultural frontier between the North and South of  
Annam, and served  
formerly as an administrative division as well.

The baskets of rice are the two great deltas formed  
by the Red and  
Mekong Rivers. They support a very dense population,

particularly in  
Tonkin, where there are five hundred inhabitants to  
the square kilo-  
metre, as against eighty-seven in the more recently  
colonized Cochin-  
Chinese delta. The narrow connecting strip of Annam's  
coastal plain  
supports an almost equally dense population.

French Indo-China's two mighty rivers are vital  
factors in the  
economy and culture of the peninsula\* The Annamites  
have always  
used their valleys as channels of expansion, and even  
to this day they  
are pushing up into the underpopulated regions of  
Cambodia and Laos  
through the waterways. The Laotians and Khmers  
live in scattered